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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of vocabulary comprehension on underprepared freshman student responses and their rating of faculty teaching performances at Delaware State University. Learning Skills Center students have weak vocabulary comprehension that might hinder their ability to accurately rate instructors. A vocabulary quiz was given to 85 predominantly African American students in the Learning Skills Center program determine their vocabulary comprehension of the evaluation form. It was found that less than half of the students understood 75 percent of the vocabulary words used in the evaluation form. Next, several sections of study skill classes were randomly divided into control and experimental groups. The word meanings were explained to the experimental group. The posttest only, control group design was used in the study to determine the effect of comprehension on their rating of instructors. The student evaluation of faculty teaching performance was then administered to all the students. The results indicated no difference in rating between the control and experimental group for individual instructors at .05 level or in the composite experimental and control groups. (Contains 15 references.) (Author/JB)

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Vocabulary Comprehension of Evaluation Form: Its Influence On Student Rating of Faculty

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Running head: VOCABULARY COMPREHENSION OF EVALUATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate effect of vocabulary comprehension in underprepared freshmen student responses on their rating of faculty teaching performances. Learning Skills Center students have weak vocabulary comprehension that might hinder their accurately rating the instructors. A vocabulary quiz was given to study skills students to determine their vocabulary comprehension of the evaluation form. It was found that less than half of the students understood 75% of the vocabulary words used in the evaluation form. Next, several sections of study skill classes were randomly divided into control and experimental groups. The word meanings were explained to the experimental group. A posttest only, control group design was used in this study to determine the effect of comprehension on their rating of the instructors. The student evaluation of faculty teaching performance was then administered to all the students. The results of evaluation indicated no difference in rating between the control and experimental group for individual instructors at .05 level or in the composite experimental and control groups.

Comprehension of Vocabulary of Evaluation Form: Its Influence On Student Rating of Faculty

Student evaluation of the faculty teaching performance is done routinely in most colleges and universities. This evaluation is done to measure the teaching effectiveness of instructors. These evaluations have an important effect on the decisions of promotion, merit pay, and tenure of the faculty members. At Delaware State University (DSU), a lengthy evaluation form is used by all students to evaluate faculty performance.

It has been a faculty perception that the underprepared, academically unmotivated students do not give an accurate rating to their instructors because of weak vocabulary comprehension. Underprepared students are often frustrated by words which they do not understand and will either misinterpret the question or give any answer just to respond and get on with the task at hand. Rather than admit their ignorance in front of others they will pretend that they know the meaning.

The underprepared freshmen students who are enrolled in the reading and study skills classes at the Learning Skills Center have weak vocabulary comprehension. It is likely that

they do not fully understand the meaning of the many words used in the evaluation form. If less than 80% of the students understand only 75% of the vocabulary words used in the evaluation form, then explanation of such words prior to their evaluation of the instructor should have an influence on their rating of the instructor.

At DSU, the Office of Testing developed an evaluation instrument, using several other nationally known evaluation instruments as models. This instrument of student evaluation of instructor and course has been in use for at least four years. The evaluation form is used by a broad spectrum of students at the Delaware State College, from students at the Learning Skills Center who are enrolled to strengthen their reading and study skills, to graduate students in various academic disciplines.

Academically underprepared are those students whose scores fall below the local median on Sequential Test of Educational Progress (STEP), (Miller, DSU Policy, 1976). The students are placed in the Learning Skills Center Program because of their low entrance test scores on STEP. They must satisfactorily complete courses in areas of Reading, Study Skills and Writing in the first three semesters at the College. Students earn a grade of Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory rather than a letter grade. Their comprehension of vocabulary is

usually weak. Comprehension is defined (Webster,1988) as an act of comprehending or understanding.

The evaluation instrument is composed of 58 questions; it evaluates the general lecture/discussion period within a classroom. On the reverse side of the instrument there are 16 additional questions that evaluate the accompanying laboratory courses. There is also a blank sheet for students to write their comments. Along with this form, an answer sheet which can be read by a computer is provided. The evaluation ratings are numerical and range from 5.0 (the highest) to 1.0 (the lowest).

The Learning Skills Center students who are deficient in reading comprehension may give a rating without understanding the meaning of words used in the questionnaire. There are many words such as irrelevant , stressed, adequately , and promptly , used in a sentence format in the evaluation instrument. A misunderstanding of the meaning of these words can result in an inaccurate rating of the instructor. As freshmen, students might not value the importance of the evaluation and how it may affect the instructor in his or her professional career.

Instructors have often felt that the kinds of questions that are asked require a discerning mind of a conscientious student who truly understands the questions. An instructor's

advancement hinges on these evaluations and to receive a fair evaluation is critical. This study is considered important because students' ratings of instructor are not always accurate, yet promotion, merit pay and tenure are often based on the results of these evaluations.

In an extensive search of the literature, it became apparent that research conducted on underprepared students and how their vocabulary comprehension influences their rating of instructors has been limited. What follows are examples of what currently appear in the literature.

Whittington (1984) reported that student evaluations of faculty began in an era of accountability, and the process was ritualized even though the campus atmosphere was not rebellious in the mid eighties. Belcher (1991) reported that students gave higher ratings to their instructors if they believed that they were getting good grades. The students who did not feel that they were doing as well in class gave less favorable evaluations. Marsh (1987) found that student ratings were primarily a function of the instructor rather than of course content. Feldman (1987) stated that teachers got higher ratings for their work with senior classes than when they worked with the lower levels. Also, the teachers received lower rating for classes which were compulsory than for those which were elective.

Olagunju and Jordan (1982) found that academically underprepared and unmotivated students had more complaints about learning the course materials than the academically motivated students. They also found that the overall rating score of the instructors was considerably less than the rating score obtained from highly motivated students.

The literature contains inconsistent data regarding evaluations. Jacobs (1987) found that students take faculty ratings seriously, although this finding conflicts with the perceptions of faculty. McKeachie (1979) stated that student ratings should not be used as the single measure of teaching. If student ratings are used for personnel decisions, then instructors should have a say in the interpretation of the data.

Miller (1988) made a recommendation that student evaluations when used in support of decisions for tenure or promotion, be evaluated in the light of extraneous features of the courses (such as compulsory or optional, lower level or senior level). Raskin and Plante (1979) observed that student ratings place pressures on instructors that few instructors will choose to ignore in days of budgetary constraints and retrenchment.

Machina (1987) noted that the student ratings should not be the sole criteria used in personnel decisions. When students underrate a faculty member, it is an indicator of

break in the teaching process. Machlup (1979) supported regular evaluations of teacher performance, but cautioned about the high ratings of the teacher as justification of decisions for promotion, tenure and merit pay.

Wasfi (1989) considered the student evaluation to be the only objective criterion for gauging teaching effectiveness, although he felt a short questionnaire (about 20 questions) would suffice. Aleamoni (1987) surmised from his extensive research background on student evaluation of faculty that many faculty concerns regarding the student's immaturity or capriciousness in judging teaching effectiveness were unfounded.

Harris (1982) has stated that experts' consensus is that student rating instruments for faculty evaluation have been refined and modified to the extent that their validity and reliability is no longer questionable in summative evaluation. She discovered that when responsibility of constructing the instruments was left up to individual departments, validity, reliability and consistency throughout the institution were found to be jeopardized and results inconsistent.

Student evaluations can play a significant role in the advancement of instructor's professional career. Teaching performance evaluation is extremely important to the instructor. It would be an interesting study to see how

important the freshmen underprepared students with weak vocabulary comprehension perceive this process to be.

The primary purpose of this study was to add empirical data to the body of existing literature on faculty evaluation. It was the intent of this study to explore the effect of vocabulary comprehension on faculty evaluation. If vocabulary comprehension of the evaluation questionnaire is a factor in rating of instructors then increased comprehension should be of benefit to the instructors in the form of more favorable ratings.

The vocabulary of the evaluation questionnaire contains many words which students might not fully understand. If that is indeed the case, it will become evident from the results of the vocabulary quiz, which all students will take. The vocabulary quiz will contain words from the evaluation questionnaire and will be in a sentence format similar to the questionnaire.

It was anticipated that there will be a difference in the rating of the instructors by students who are taught the meaning of words prior to their completion of the evaluation instrument. Their rating should show a difference from the rating of those students who did not receive any instruction.

The university from which the data was obtained is a progressive liberal arts institution serving a diverse student

population. The students participating in this study were derived from the study skills classes of the fall of 1992. Students of three different professors participated in this study. The three professors each have a teaching experience of twenty years. Each section of a study skills class was randomly divided to identify an experimental group and a control group.

The experimental variable was the teaching of the word meanings used in the evaluation questionnaire. The outcome of this treatment should yield a more accurate rating of the instructor since the criteria are better understood.

The study was necessarily limited to the fall 1992 freshman class entering DSU, Dover, DE. This study was also limited to the extent that the sample of academically underprepared students was primarily African-American, which might not be representative of the total population. This study might be limited due to the fact that student's consent and prior knowledge of their participation in this experimental study were institutionally required

This study delimited vocabulary comprehension to the words or phrases used in the evaluation questionnaire.

Method

Campbell and Stanley's (1963) design #6 was used for this study. In this design, no pretest is given, only a posttest is used for both control and experimental groups. This design is suitable for situations where a pretest would be awkward and the student anonymity must be retained. This design is strong in both internal and external validity. Extraneous variables such as history, maturation, testing, instrumentation, regression, selection, and interaction of selection and maturation are controlled and are not threats to the internal validity. The external variables such as interaction effect of testing was controlled because this design does not require a pretest.

Control and experimental groups were randomly selected from each section of the study skills classes. An experimenter made quiz using vocabulary words contained in the questionnaire and designed in a sentence format was used. The individual professors administered and graded the quizzes using agreed upon criteria for correct responses.

Subjects

Students enrolled in the study skill classes taught by three different professors participated in this study. It was a predominantly African-American group. Many of these students were non traditional students. The students were

apprised of the nature of the study and their participation was voluntary.

Procedure

In order to test the vocabulary comprehension of the students of different professors who teach two sections each of study skills courses, a vocabulary comprehension quiz was given. This quiz contained 20 words chosen from the evaluation questionnaire and used in a sentence format.

All the students were asked to respond as to whether or not they understood the meaning of words or not by placing a check mark on the two columns, as well as their personal definition of the word meaning. In this way the percentage of students who did not understand the word meanings in the context were identified. If 80% of the students did not understand 75% of the word meanings then the students will be judged to have difficulty with the meaning of words. If they did understand the meaning, then other factors had an influence. A comprehension level of 75% was chosen because that is the level required to obtain Satisfactory "S" grade in the LSC classes for successful completion of the course work.

VOCABULARY QUIZ

Check the meaning of the underlined words in the sentences below in the right hand column (known or not known). Write the meaning of the underlined words in the personal definition column.

	Meaning Known	Not Known	Personal Definition
1. Does your class use supplementary reading?	_____	_____	_____
2. Is the clarity of material an aid to understanding?	_____	_____	_____
3. Are the course objectives maintained in the classroom?	_____	_____	_____
4. Is the room adequately equipped with light?	_____	_____	_____
5. Are your papers graded promptly ?	_____	_____	_____
6. Do you receive constructive feedback?	_____	_____	_____
7. Do you understand the criticism of your returned paper?	_____	_____	_____
8. Do you understand the objective of each class exercise?	_____	_____	_____
9. Is there any real life application of what you have learned in the class?	_____	_____	_____
10. Do you copy down the homework assignment accurately?	_____	_____	_____
11. Are you receptive to different styles of teaching?	_____	_____	_____

	Vocabulary	Comprehension	
12. Do you read books that are relevant to your future career?	_____	_____	_____
13. Do you incorporate learning from different sources ?	_____	_____	_____
14. Do you understand the concepts of the subject taught?	_____	_____	_____
15. Do you know the principles of the subject matter?	_____	_____	_____
16. Do you find some matter irrelevant in discussion?	_____	_____	_____
17. Was the transition from one topic to another clear?	_____	_____	_____
18. Are the important points stressed for your understanding?	_____	_____	_____
19. Is the subject matter taught creatively?	_____	_____	_____
20. Do you review the material periodically?	_____	_____	_____

Next, the students were randomly divided into two groups, the experimental group of students was taught the meaning of the words (Appendix B), while the other group did not receive such instruction. The control group was kept out of hearing range in another room while engaged in their daily activities. Immediately afterwards, the two groups were brought together and asked to complete the teaching performance evaluation of the instructor. Their answer sheets were color coded to keep the experimental and control groups' responses separate. Two separate class periods of 50

minutes were devoted to these activities by the classes that met on Monday, Wednesday and Friday schedules. For the classes that met Tuesday and Thursday for 75 minutes, a similar time period was utilized.

The author wanted to see if the vocabulary comprehension affects the student ratings when the control group and experimental group's ratings were compared. Evaluation ratings were tabulated and statistical analysis was done on a personal computer, utilizing "Excel" program. An initial descriptive statistical analysis was done to determine if further inferential statistical analysis of data was necessary.

It was hoped that this study would give valuable data concerning the vocabulary comprehension factor that might affect the student rating of the teaching performance of their instructor.

Results

To maintain the anonymity of the professors, they were designated letters A, B and C for the results and ensuing discussion. Results from the vocabulary quiz showed that 53% of the student (N=85) failed the vocabulary comprehension quiz at 75% level. In other words less than 80% of the students understood 75% of the vocabulary words used in the evaluation form. The data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Vocabulary Comprehension of Evaluation Form

Professor/ Section	No. of students taking test	No. of students scoring <75%
A1	14	11
A2	11	6
B1	12	8
B2	17	8
C1	18	8
C2	13	4
Total	85	45

An initial descriptive statistical analysis was done on the student ratings received by each individual professor. It was found that the ratings of the control and experimental groups did not differ significantly at .05 level. The analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Comparison of ratings of individual professors

	Professor A		Professor B		Professor C	
	Cont.	Expt.	Cont.	Expt.	Cont.	Expt.
Mean	4.09	4.23	3.58	3.86	4.20	4.17
Median	4.12	4.24	3.67	3.89	4.18	4.19
Mode	3.94	4.18	3.69	3.94	4.18	4.19
Std.Dev.	0.34	0.30	0.29	0.27	0.23	0.17
Variance	0.18	0.09	0.08	0.07	0.05	0.03
Kurtosis	0.13	-0.14	-0.52	-0.28	-0.46	-1.128
Skewness	-0.33	-0.13	-0.54	-0.36	0.22	-0.34
Sum	208.5	215.8	182.4	197.1	214.1	212.5
Conf.level	0.094	0.081	0.079	0.073	0.062	0.046

Note. Std. Dev. = Standard Deviation, Conf. level = Confidence level, Expt. = Experimental group, Cont.= Control group.

Next, all the experimental groups ratings of the three different professors were combined and a composite of control and experimental group were compared. An initial descriptive analysis again failed to show significant difference at .05 level. Table 3 shows composite ratings.

Table 3.
Comparison of control and experimental ratings.

	Control Rating	Expt. Rating
Mean	3.95	4.09
Std. Deviation	0.40	0.29
Kurtosis	-0.20	0.38
Skewness	-0.38	-0.29
Conf. level (95%)	0.06	0.05

Table 4.
t-test of significance

	Control	Expt.
Mean	3.95	4.09
Variance	0.16	0.09
Observations	153	153
Pearson Correlation	0.75	
Pooled Variance	3.50	
df	280.80	
t	-3.33	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00	
t Critical one-tail	1.65	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.00	
t Critical two-tail	1.97	

Table 4 shows the t-test of significance between two samples assuming unequal variances.

Discussion

As stated earlier in the report, this study was undertaken to determine the effect of vocabulary comprehension on faculty ratings by academically underprepared college freshmen.

Findings indicated that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups at $p>.05$ level. Although the gains in the evaluation ratings of individual instructors A and B were small and were not confirmed to be statistically significant by analysis, they nonetheless looked better than those given by control group. These two professors also had larger number of students scoring <75% on vocabulary quiz, whereas professor C who had the least number of students scoring <75%, showed a slight decline in rating given by her students.

Recommendations for further research include selection of a larger sample size, as well as testing another sample of ethnically balanced mixture of academically underprepared students from another four-year institution. Such a group might be more representative of the total population and provide data more suitable to generalization. Another

variation of the study might be to test the vocabulary comprehension after a two week period to determine retention or understanding of the words used.

Although there was no statistically significant difference detected in the evaluation ratings, it is recommended that LSC students be explained the meanings of the evaluation questionnaire words prior to its administration. Invariably, the comfort level experienced by student is raised when confident or cognizant of the word meanings whether it be a test or evaluation or a survey, thus ensuring the accuracy with which the task is done.

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